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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER ARAB KNESSET MEMBER BISHARA SPEAKS AT DOHA DEMOCRACY
CONFERENCE

11. (U) Former Arab member of the Israeli Knesset Azmi Bishara was a featured speaker on the "Political Reform: National Programs and External Projects" panel of the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade on April 24. Speaking without notes, Bishara asked how a state could be built on the ruins of another state. He wondered rhetorically why it was acceptable to build a nation from different ethnic groups in order to build a religious state. Israeli democracy is based on religion and is exclusively for Jews, he claimed. Bishara could not complete his talk as the panel had run out of time.

Bishara's Resignation Final

12. (U) Interviewed by the Qatari English-language daily "The Peninsula," Bishara said that his decision to resign was final and had the effect of cutting short internal procedures against him in the Knesset. He said that the Knesset committee's preparation of a series of charges and plans to prosecute was directed at trying to wipe out the Arab national movement. (Note: Bishara is allegedly accused of aiding the enemy -- Lebanon -- in wartime, violating money-laundering laws, and other security-related crimes.) He did not believe there were any attempts by the government of Israel to assassinate him, but Jewish extremists might attempt such a thing. He asserted that such threats would not deter him from continuing his work or changing his positions.

Supports the Arab Initiative

13. (U) On the Arab Peace Initiative with Israel, Bishara told the newspaper that it would not work unless Israel took it without modification or delay. He supports the initiative in its present shape, reminding that he was the most prominent person inside Israel

to call for its implementation. Bishara added that democracy as promoted by the West has lost credibility, the most noteworthy example being the international response to the election of Hamas in the Palestinian National Assembly.

Will Visit Other Arab States

¶4. (U) Bishara announced that he will not return imminently to Israel and will go on moving between a number of Arab states. He said that he has received so far a number of invitations from Arab countries offering him residence. Neither Bishara nor Qatar's official agency confirmed that he would reside in Qatar.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) Bishara was well-received by Qatari and other Arab participants in the forum. When the panel was over, many were exited to greet Bishara personally. He was seen by the Qatari public as one of the most respected Arab thinkers and was seen with a number of local intellectuals. There is a good possibility that Bishara will choose Doha as his place of exile; his brother Marwan, a news analyst for Al Jazeera International (the English channel), resides here also.
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